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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 000459

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SUBJECT: NEW FORCES MUTINY IN TOWNS OF SEGUELA AND VAVOUA

Classified By: POLITICAL/ECONOMIC SECTION CHIEF SILVIA EIRIZ FOR REASON
S 1.4 (B/D)

¶1. (C) Summary. New Forces troops in the center-west towns of Seguela and Vavoua rioted on June 28. The troops in Seguela called for the reinstatement of their former Commander, Zachariah Kone, who had been removed by Prime Minister Soro in May. The soldiers in Vavoua protested the government's failure to pay their regroupment bonuses. Soro publicly criticized the uprisings, which raised questions about his ability to control the New Forces. Soro has remained in Bouake since June 29 except for a brief visit to Abidjan to meet President Gbagbo upon his return from the African Union summit. Gbagbo has announced plans to visit Seguela on July ¶14. End Summary.

¶2. (U) New Forces troops in the center-west town of Seguela attacked the residence of their new Zone commander, Issiaka "Wattao" Ouattara, on June 28. According to a July 4 press release issued by the New Forces, mutinous New Forces troops attacked other New Forces troops who fired in self defense, killing one of the attackers and wounding two of them. The same day, New Forces troops in the town of Vavoua, also in the center-west, took four New Forces officers hostage.

CLASHES REFLECT FINANCIAL AND POLITICAL GRIEVANCES

¶3. (U) The uprising in Seguela was to demand the reinstatement of Zone Commander Zachariah Kone, who was dismissed by Prime Minister Soro in May after failing to attend a regroupment ceremony. Kone's specific whereabouts remain unknown although numerous press reports indicate he is in Burkina Faso. Wattao was named interim commander and there have been allegations that he removed troops loyal to Kone from economically lucrative checkpoints and other positions. The confrontation in Seguela seems to have been a clash between Kone loyalists and Wattao loyalists. The events in Vavoua, on the other hand, were prompted by the failure of the government to pay regrouped troops the 90,000 CFA (circa USD 415) bonus to which they are entitled. The troops also complained that their food rations had been cut and that they were no longer provided with medical treatment. Order was restored to both Seguela and Vavoua by June 30 and the hostages in Vavoua released with the assistance of impartial forces -- United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI) peacekeepers and French "Licorne" troops. However, the underlying reasons for the tensions in Seguela remain.

¶4. (C) A contact close to the Prime Minister told Ambassador July 8 that the reason Zachariah Kone failed to attend the regroupment ceremony in May and the reason his troops subsequently refused to accept a new commander is that they disagree with Soro's regroupment strategy. According to this source, Soro wants the New Forces to comply with the OPA and regroup before the election, regardless of whether other conditions have been met, to avoid criticism from the Gbagbo camp. Kone believed regroupment should wait until reintegration mechanisms, i.e., the civic service, the PNRRC, etc. are in place and it is clear that identification

documents will be issued. Kone's absence from the ceremony was meant as a signal to his troops that they did not have to follow Soro's orders. New Forces Chief of Staff General Soumaila Bakayoko began discussions with the riotous troops on June 30, but walked out of one of the meetings when the atmosphere reportedly became too acrimonious. On July 3, the troops reportedly agreed to be regrouped and, according to press reports, were taken to Kani on the 3rd and on the 4th. An aide to PM Soro told Ambassador, however, that the mutinous troops had been broken up into three groups and sent to different locations in the hope that this would end the trouble. One group agreed to be regrouped; the remaining two were sent to serve in a different zone under a different commander.

15. (C) Prime Minister Soro was in the New Forces stronghold of Bouake on June 29 to attend ceremonies marking the one-year anniversary of the rocket attack on his plane in which 4 of his collaborators were killed. He said the actions of the rebellious troops risked discrediting the New Forces and that his removal of Kone was an issue of military discipline. He attributed the delay in payment of bonuses to the government's budgetary difficulties. Soro has remained in Bouake since June 29 and has indicated to a number of contacts in Abidjan that he may not return until he is certain the funds to pay scheduled bonuses are available. President Gbagbo has announced plans to visit Seguela on July 14, a step that is being perceived as a deliberate slap at Soro. Long-time observers believe the President's objective is to demonstrate to the New Forces that he is reasserting his authority over the nation, and that the New Forces should no longer look to Soro as their commander. Embassies plan to

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travel to Seguela later that same week.

16. (C) Comment. The events in Seguela and Bouake once again raise the question of how much control Soro actually exercises over the New Forces. These disturbances are a reminder that the New Forces, which were an amalgamation of three different rebel groups (the MPCJ, MJP, and MPIGO), are fragmenting as their future and economic prospects become increasingly unclear and the regroupment process advances. In Cote d'Ivoire's Machiavellian political climate, some have speculated that President Gbagbo's camp could be intentionally orchestrating discontent among the New Forces by refusing to release the funds necessary to pay the bonuses due to the regrouped troops. Whether or not this is true, there is clearly a level of discontent within the New Forces that could have an impact on the election and it is equally clear that a continued failure to pay bonuses on time is likely to lead to renewed outbreaks of violence. End Comment.
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